

Keep our Missile Defense Strong
By Dan Burton
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The political climate in Washington D.C. has changed dramatically since the Democrats won control over Congress, and as a result the Bush administration has had to make some serious compromises in order to keep intact the cornerstone of its strategy: victory in the Global War on Terror. Concessions have been ceded across the board to preserve our efforts to win this war, but one area where concessions are not an option is on our national missile defense system.

To be sure, as Congress begins to address the President's FY'08 budget request, one place from which the Democrats will look to cut funding is the Missile Defense Agency (MDA); the entity responsible for researching, developing and fielding our missile defenses. We can expect the usual barrage of complaints from the Democrats against a missile defense system. In their perpetual quest to cut funding for a system to defend the United States, Democrats will falsely assert once again that missile defense doesn't work. This charge is patently false, and despite the frequency with which it has been circulated, MDA has demonstrated repeatedly and indisputably that not only does missile defense work, but improvements are made to our system – a system vital to the preservation of the United States of America – every single day.

Since 2001, MDA has successfully achieved 24 hit-to-kill intercepts; fourteen out of the last 15 flight tests have been successful; and over the past 15 months, MDA has championed successful Aegis SM-3 intercepts against separating warheads, successful THAAD intercepts of unitary targets, and a successful intercept target with our long range interceptor, to name just a few.

This investment in our national security couldn't have come a moment too soon; as MDA has worked to develop and improve our capabilities, North Korea and Iran have worked to buttress their own offensive missile inventories and nuclear development programs. President Bush didn't commission MDA to do this important work because he wanted to begin another arms race: he did it because he saw the threat – the very real threat – America faces today, and wants to protect Americans from that threat. It would be sheer folly to take away resources from the one entity that could protect America against missile attacks and nuclear war, especially at a time when our enemies are mobilizing against us.

Democrats tout that diplomacy is the best way to address these threats, and that missile defense is not needed. But the recent deal struck between the Bush administration and an unconvincingly contrite North Korea should give us no comfort that we are safe from the nuclear war Kim Jong-Il has threatened us with; after all, this deal is all too reminiscent of the Clinton administration's 1994 agreement which is how Kim acquired his nukes to begin with. Nor has Kim made any pledges to surrender the nuclear weapons currently in his possession. Former Ambassador John Bolton has rightly

chastised the Bush administration for reverting “to a policy that has failed in the past,” and is concerned about the message this sends to an increasingly defiant Iran.

Considering Iran’s utter disregard for all the deadlines the U.N. has imposed on it to stop uranium enrichment to date, its latest refusal to respect that deadline should come as no surprise. What is surprising, though, is IAEA Director General Mohammed El Baradei’s recent observation that the Iranians undoubtedly intend to use their nuclear program for something other than peaceful purposes. Perhaps now that Mr. El Baradei has concluded what many of us have been saying about Iran’s ambitions and intents, the rest of the world will see Iran and the grave threat it poses.

Make no mistake, both of these regimes will carry on their nuclear weapons and enrichment programs despite agreements and deadlines. Currently, they each have extensive missile development programs. They have short to medium range missiles and are developing longer range missiles. We can deduce from recent North Korean and Iranian launches that both regimes have an interest in honing the reliability of their missiles, and wish to build on what they have already achieved.

When diplomacy fails, we need to have something in place we can rely on to keep our homeland and countrymen safe from harm. A missile defense system to protect the United States and our allies can do that. Cutting funding for MDA at this time would not only leave us vulnerable to such an attack, it would stymie our growth and development, possibly to the point where our capabilities were eclipsed by those of our enemies. We cannot take this risk, particularly while our enemies work to perfect their own defensive and offensive capabilities.

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